

Eddy Croes

Roads less traveled

with Eddy Croes

Riding with Eddy Croes on his Aruba Nature Sensitive Tour, one experiences the undisturbed Aruba countryside from the inside out! He not only reveals staggeringly beautiful sights off the beaten path but also perspectives on the Aruban psyche.

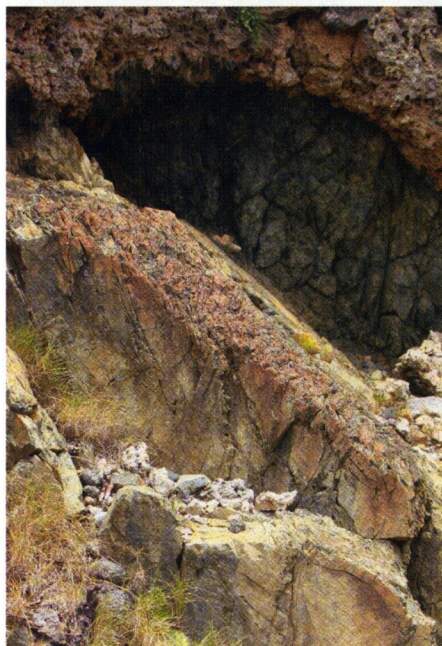
Eddy is a naturalist and geologist, a walking encyclopedia of Aruba's formation, flora and fauna. He identifies the reddish soil of iron hydroxide, the grey tonalite boulders, the black basalt rock. "Divi divi is actually the fruit of the watapana tree not the name of the tree...The northern part of the island is higher with more hills than the rest of the island; during volcanic eruptions thousands of years ago, the trade winds from the northeast provided a constant supply of fuel (oxygen) to the volcanic activity ... this kept the volcanic eruptions active for a longer period of time resulting in more build-up of lava on the northern part of the island." he explains.

We drive inland and reach Marawiel, trading paved roads for rough unforgiving terrain, climbing higher and higher. Surrounding Eddy's monster jeep are surprisingly green ground cover and dense thorny thickets. Many cacti have died due to unusually heavy rains this year. We are in the heart of the Aruban countryside, silent except for the occasional bird, the rustling of trade winds,



the distant sounds of the sea. A narrow sand road bordered by spindly brush climbs up to Sero Crystal (Crystal Mountain), one of the most beautiful natural areas on the island accessible only by the giant wheels of the 4 x 4 monster jeep. In the distance is Mount Jamanota, the island's highest point, and we are almost as high. Below is a breathtaking panorama of rolling hills, thick desert vegetation, foamy turquoise Caribbean waters, and the high-rise hotel strip in the distance; civilization is only a few miles away yet it seems a distant dream.

After our bumpy descent, we pass again through uneven terrain to the mysterious rock formations of Ayo, suddenly appearing from nowhere; then another challenging drive to Andicuri, a white sand oasis between two steep cliffs in the midst of the desert, bordered by magnificent churning waters. Eddy points out the different layers of



Main photo: We are in the heart of the Aruban countryside, silent except for the occasional bird, the rustling of trade winds, the distant sounds of the sea.

Above: Eddy Croes is a naturalist and geologist, a walking encyclopedia of Aruba's formation, flora and fauna, taking you way beyond the beaten path.

Left: Aruba's geological development can be traced by examining its rocks.

volcanic rock, and above it the sea bottom that was pushed up by volcanic activity. "The Aruban landscape keeps on changing with erosion and rain and the play of light. It is magical."

All the while, Eddy proudly tells the story of Aruba's history, beginning with the Caquetio Indians who inhabited the island thousands of years ago, hailing from the Amazon and Venezuela. Life was peaceful



until Christopher Columbus crossed the sea in search of gold, forcefully spreading Christianity and decimating the Indians. The geological make up of the island (quartz) led the Spaniards to believe Aruba contained gold but, unable to locate it, they deemed Aruba a useless island. Around 1500, the Indian children were enslaved and taken to work on the Spanish estates in Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). Except for a few Spaniards who remained in Aruba, the island was practically uninhabited; it was a one big ranch with sheep, cattle and goats. In the early 17th century, an invincible European power, the Dutch, expelled the Spaniards in the "Eighty Years' War" and

Above: *Mysterious rock formations create an eerie silhouette against the desert landscape.*

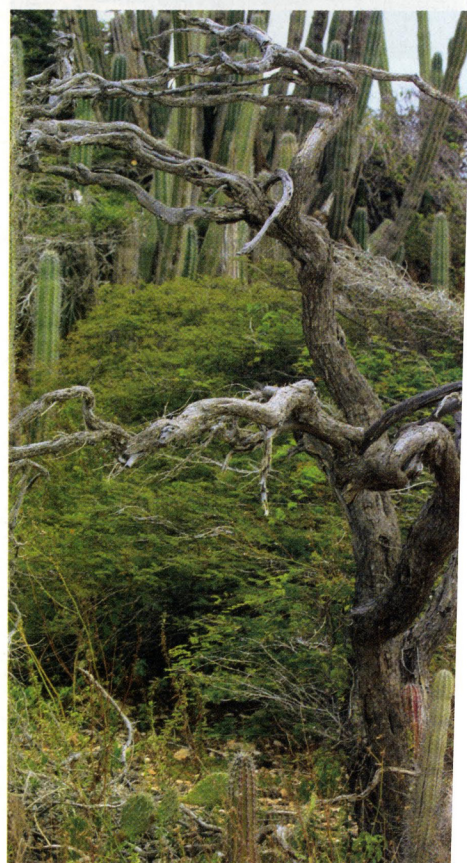
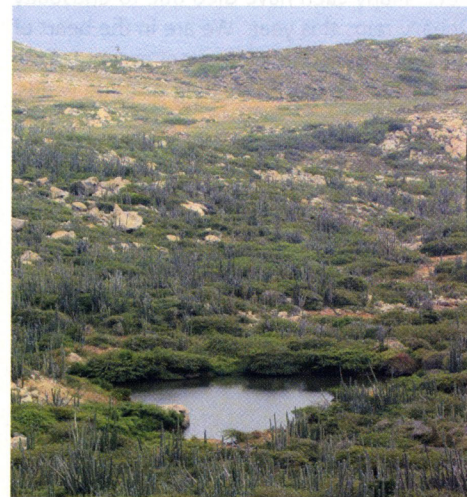
Above right: *A breathtaking panorama of rolling hills, thick desert vegetation, foamy turquoise Caribbean waters, and the high-rise hotel strip in the distance; civilization is only a few miles away yet it seems a distant dream.*

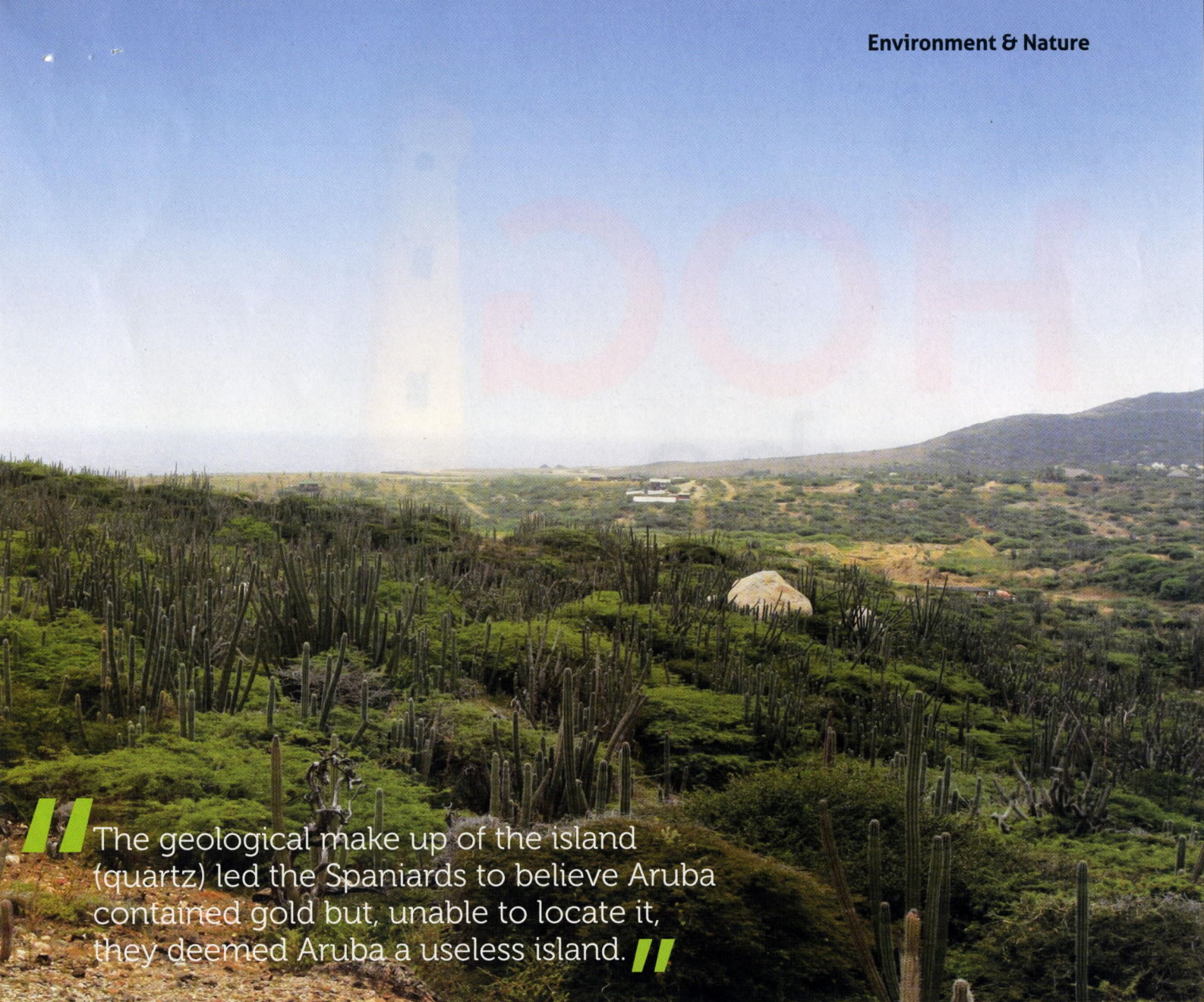
settled in Aruba and the other islands that would become part of the Netherlands Antilles."

"It's as if our ethnicity was made in a blender. More Europeans arrived in the late 18th century. Italians came to work the goldmines in the late 1880s; immigrants from the U.S. and Canada, Caribbean and Suriname came to work in the refinery beginning in

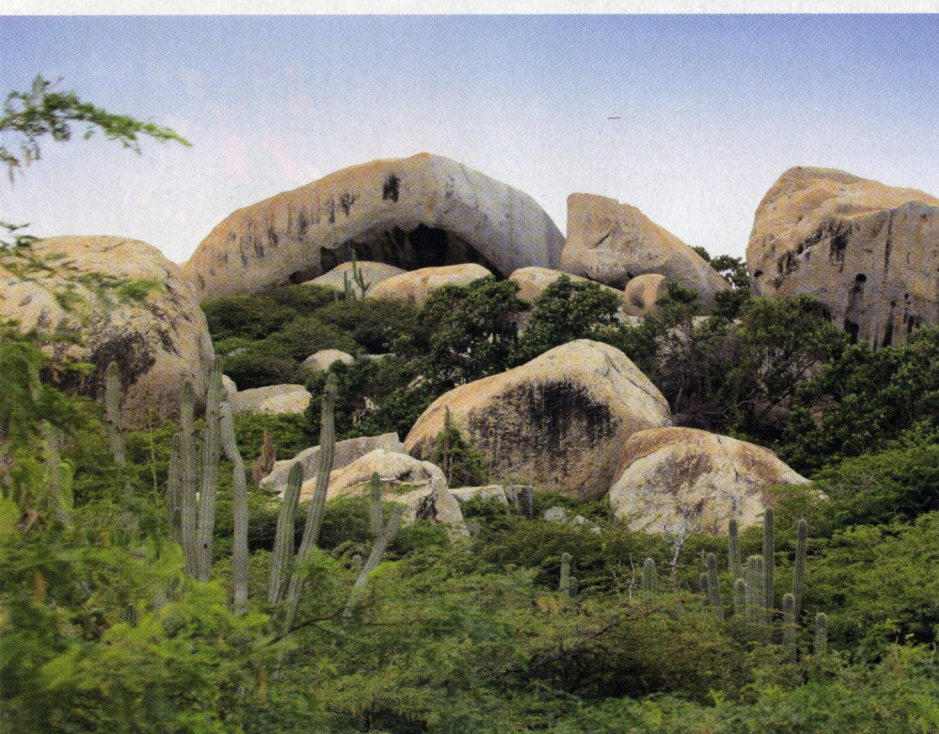
1922; Jews from Eastern Europe reached our shores in World War II years; the Chinese arrived after the war. Eddy explains how the Dutch did not treat the islands as colonies; to start they established a culture and a way of life that valued the individual and provided for them from birth to death."

"Arubans enjoy a simple and happy existence. Most of our daily life is happily spent outside. It took our moms nine months to give birth to us and we have never been in a hurry since then. We don't drive fast as we can fall into the sea. We don't need elegant clothes. Our lives are joyful and loving. We take our elderly to the sea every week; we visit them all the time and dance joyfully with them...I have nothing to say at home; women brought us into the world and remain the boss...It's best not to have your house too close to your neighbor; our windows are often open and we are used to speaking loudly to be heard over the trade winds."





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Eddy's Aruban roots can be traced back to 1623, the years of the Dutch West India Company on Aruba; he has both Dutch and African ancestors. He grew up simply in San Nicolas, one of eight children. "We weren't rich but we had everything we needed. My dad worked in the Lago refinery which employed more than 90% of the Arubans. As a child, my passion was exploring; how fortunate I am that it ultimately became my life's work. I studied geology and history in Holland and then returned to Aruba after 25 years. At first, I was in government service as one of the planners of the Arikok National Park and the lead ranger for five years. I now have my own tour business. My humble upbringing was a great gift; I respect and value life. I am satisfied with what I have and it makes my life rich."

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